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## INTERNATIONAL

# Attacks on Iranian cities strengthen Tehran regime, nationalism

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Iraq's air attacks on Iranian cities have only served to strengthen Iranian nationalism and the Islamic regime in Tehran, according to Western observers contacted in Tehran.

"If they [the Iraqis] assume they'll bring us to our knees, they're wrong," says an Iranian woman in Tehran. "If necessary we'll go to the battlefield with swords and knives but we won't bow."

The Iraqis, analysts say, have apparently failed in their effort to push Iranian citizens to pressure the government to end the 4½-year war. Iranian officials insist that peace is not possible as long as Iraqi President Saddam Hussein is in power.

The mood in Tehran is one of resentment toward the international community for not urging the Iraqis to stop the attacks, which began March 4, Iranians contacted in Tehran say.

The attacks have failed to disrupt daily life there seriously, according to Iranians and Western diplomats in Tehran. Work in factories and offices is going on as usual, they say.

The cancellation of European and Japanese commercial flights to and from Tehran, following Iraq's recent threat to shoot down airliners in Iranian airspace, at first isolated the country. But Iran Air, the national carrier, has resumed regular flights to the United Arab Emirates—where Iranian goods and passengers are transferred to other airlines.

Iranian oil revenues have been hard hit by relentless Iraqi air raids on tankers near Iran's main oil terminal at Kharg Is-

land, but the effect on the Iranian economy is unclear. The Iranian oil industry has been up and down in recent months, according to a European oil executive. Iranian crude sales, the executive says, are currently running at 1.2 million barrels a day, half a million barrels below average. Most European companies have stopped buying Iranian oil, the executive says. Iran's major customer remains Japan, though its seamen's union has asked its members to boycott Kharg Island.

The National Iranian Oil Company has hired five large carriers to shuttle oil from Kharg to Sirri Island, where the crude is pumped into Japanese tankers—out of range of Iraqi aircraft. Two of those carriers are said to have been hit by Iraqi missiles, further reducing Iranian exports.

Since the "war of the cities" began March 4, several hundred Iranian civilians are believed to have died, although it is impossible to determine exact figures. Bakhtaran (formerly Kermanshah) and Isfahan, Iran's second largest city, have suffered the most, according to an Iranian official. Iraq said its warplanes raided six Iranian cities and towns Thursday, including Isfahan. Tens of thousands of Iranians from border towns have recently sought refuge in Turkey, according to Turkish authorities.

Iran has hit Iraqi cities in retaliation over the past few weeks. Iranian officials have claimed that they are ready to stop attacks on civilian targets if the Iraqis do the same. But the Iraqis have pledged to wage full-scale war until Tehran agrees to an overall settlement to the war.

On Wednesday the Iranians fired a ground-to-ground missile at Baghdad, causing the sixth big explosion in the

Iraqi capital since March 14. IRNA, the Iranian official news agency, says the missile had been fired in retaliation for a spate of Iraqi air raids on Iranian cities.

Iranian officials contacted in Tehran deny their troops suffered a defeat in the recent battle in the Hawizeh marshes.

"No more than 721 fighters have been killed or are missing in this offensive," says a usually well-informed Iranian source. The source contends that the aim of the thrust was not to take control of the Baghdad-Basra highway but to occupy the marshy area between the international border and the Tigris River.

The Iraqis claimed to have killed 27,000 Iranians in the battle. Western intelligence sources have confirmed the gist of Iraq's claim, saying thousands of Iranians were killed.

Earlier this week, Belgian scientists confirmed Iranian allegations that three Iranian soldiers in a Belgian hospital were suffering from burns caused by mustard gas. United States officials also accused Iraq on Tuesday of having used chemical weapons against Iranian fighters.

"I was standing in my trench on an island in the Hawizeh marsh," explains a young Iranian in a Belgian hospital. "Iraqi aircraft dropped a few canisters and seconds later I found myself in the middle of a gray mist. I rushed to my gas mask but it was too late and I fainted."

Baghdad flatly denies that its forces have ever used chemical weapons against Iranian fighters.

*Claude van England writes on Iran from his base in Brussels.*